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ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

RESPONSE TO

THE SPECIALIZATION YEARS: Guide to Discussion and Response

June, 1992

ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION

The ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS' ASSOCIATION represents over 90 public boards of education from all regions of the province, serving over 1,700,000 students and adult learners. OPSBA speaks for public education in Ontario and represents the interest of the public school trustees to the government, the public and the media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This submission was prepared by the OPSBA Curriculum Committee:

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INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association, representing 93 public school boards from all regions of the province, welcomes the opportunity to provide its views on education during the specialization years.

Unlike the early years and the transition years in which specific government policy directions had already been made in which school boards have been mandated to provide Kindergarten programs and de-stream grade 9, no specific policy initiatives have been announced for the specialization years. This provides school boards with the genuine opportunity to comment on the consultation document and propose directions with regard to what we want education to accomplish.

The specialization years cannot be treated in isolation from the previous segments of the education continuum. The current proposals for change both in terms of what is taught and the way in which education is taught in the transition years will have significant consequences for the specialization years. This is particularly true if a policy decision is made to expand the de-streaming initiative until the end of compulsory schooling (Grade 10). As such, they must be taken into account when developing policy directions.

But before any major changes are proposed in the specialization years, the credit system and the ways in which the programs are organized, there must the development of consensus on what we want our educational system to do - what knowledge, skills and attitudes we want our students to develop before they reach the end of their formal education. We need to develop an overall framework for our educational system, establish clear goals, priorities, expected outcomes for students and a statement of what the public can - and cannot- expect its school system to deliver.

EDUCATION WITH A PURPOSE

A central question that must be answered with regard to education in the specialization years, is specialization for what? What are the most important educational needs of students at this stage in school? What should being a secondary school graduate mean? What do we want students to "know" when they reach the end of secondary schooling? Should specialization take the form of a concentrated learning of subjects that will provide a solid background to future learning and on-the-job training or should it teach specific skills?

OPSBA believes that a common, but not necessarily the exact same education experience, must be available to all. A "core" education program with defined outcomes, measures of student achievement and clear school board accountability for delivery must be accessible province-wide. A common program does not, however, suggest common goals and objectives.

School boards may have a multi-purpose mission, but it is recognized that central to the function of education is the promotion of a full range of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are the pre-requisite to achievement in almost all fields of human endeavour.

Individual Needs and Common Needs

There is the need for balance. There is the need to reconcile the demand, on the one hand, for greater equity, flexibility and individualized responses with the demand, on the other, for uniform standards, benchmarks and a common educational experience. There is also the need to balance the dual responsibilities of the education system to meet the needs of the learner and also meet the needs of a rapidly changing, technologically oriented society.

School boards should provide courses of study and instructional strategies which are flexible, responsive and adaptive to the specific needs and abilities of the learner and which recognize the role that education plays in enhancing the social, economic and cultural life of this province.

In addition to recognizing the need for a balance between the needs of the individual and the need for common foundation skills, there is the need to balance, during the specialization years, the needs of those students intending to attend post-secondary institutions and those who will be going directly to work.

Dual Mandate

Schools have a dual mandate to serve those students who are going on to post-secondary education as well as those who will be making the transition from school to work.

School boards must provide programs that not only ensure competency in core curricular areas, but must also be flexible in offering a variety of programs including vocational and technical programs which contribute to the successful transition from school to work and from school to post-secondary education.

Secondary education has traditionally had both academic and vocational objectives but enrolment in vocational programs has remained low.

In the secondary schools of this province there is currently a bias towards university education. This bias influences the secondary school delivery system, curriculum and student choices. The public school system in Ontario must begin to pay as much attention to preparing students for employment immediately after graduation as to preparing those heading for post-secondary education.

The public school system has a vital role to play in encouraging and facilitating lifelong learning. School boards must begin to appreciate that for a majority of students, improving their future employment potential is an appropriate expected outcome of a secondary school program.

Schools have the responsibility for providing the "foundation level of education" which includes the knowledge, attitudes and skills students should demonstrate. These include communication, problem solving/investigational, personal and social skills as well as individual motivation and commitment. Also required are core entry level vocational skills appropriate for employment, skilled trades training, college or university entrance. The vocational purpose of education can be re-integrated and strengthened through the promotion of the value of technologies, mathematics and science, by ensuring students' acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills and generic work skills.

Cooperative Approach

It must also be recognized that education is a shared responsibility and a cooperative process involving the individual, the family, the community and society. It must achieve a balance between the needs of the individual learner and society, the needs of the local community and the province. Linkages between businesses and post-secondary institutions must be developed and encouraged.

Flexibility

Whatever recommendations for change in the current specialization years programs and delivery models are proposed, there must be a recognition that individual school boards require flexibility in implementation. There must be a recognition that one program model applied uniformly across the province is not the answer.

Only once there is consensus on the role of the school system and what we want students to learn in the specialization years, will it be possible to discuss, in any depth, specific implementation issues whether they be the credit system, the organization of the school year or teaching styles and techniques.

GENERAL TOPICS

G1. Adult Education

A growing number of adults, for a variety of reasons, are returning to school. To guarantee opportunities for lifelong learning on a systematic basis, OPSBA believes that school boards should be given a clear mandate to provide these services.

School boards can, do and should play a pivotal role in the provision of life-long learning opportunities for adults. However, there are a number of difficulties in providing for these opportunities due to the lack of a clear understanding of the role of adult continuing education in our society and, more specifically, the mandate of school boards in the provision of these programs.

OPSBA has developed a comprehensive position paper on the role of school boards in adult and adult continuing education. A copy is provided in Appendix A.

In addition to discussing some of the unique characteristics of adult continuing education as they relate to program delivery, assessment and evaluation, teacher training, wrap-around services and linkages; we argue that before there can be a constructive discussion of the various matters in the delivery of adult and adult continuing education by school boards, three central issues have to be resolved:

- adult continuing education has to be recognized as a legitimate part of the mandate of school boards;
- a comprehensive provincial funding model which includes adult education must be developed;
- coordination and cooperation in the provision of adult continuing education programs at the local, provincial and federal levels must take place.

Twenty-four specific recommendations for change in the provision of programs for adults by school boards are articulated.

Ontario Training and Adjustment Initiatives

Although not limited to adult education, the current government proposals for the establishment of both provincial and local training and adjustment boards must be considered when examining the role of education in the specialization years.

The proposed changes will have major impact on the number and type of programs that school boards provide at the secondary level during the specialization years. These programs include, to name a few, apprenticeship, cooperative education and school to work transition programs.

A copy of the OPSBA response to *Skills to Meet the Challenge: A Training Partnership for Ontario*, is included in Appendix B for consideration by the specialization years workteam.

G2. Assessment and Evaluation

OPSBA believes that the prime purpose of evaluating student achievement is to improve that achievement. At the same time, we affirm the importance of accountability. A comprehensive policy on assessment and evaluation must foster both good teaching practice and public understanding of the results of that practice. OPSBA believes that it is possible to maintain the professional autonomy of the teacher in evaluating students and yet be publicly accountable for standards.

To this end, OPSBA has developed a policy statement and rationale on the evaluation of student achievement. A copy of the OPSBA policy is included in Appendix C as well as a listing of those boards that have city-wide examinations and/or benchmarks.

G3. Educational Technology

OPSBA believes that technological literacy is a life skill in today's world. Schools have a responsibility to provide all students with exposure to technological concepts and, for those who choose, opportunities to develop their interests further. Technological awareness must be an integral part of a basic education for all students, whatever their eventual career choices.

The role of educational technology in the specialization years both in terms of policies that encourage learning about, and through, technology has been dealt with in some depth by the Technological Education Workteam. OPSBA has previously submitted its comments on technological education and the specialization years workteam is urged to work closely with the technological workteam when developing policies for the specialization years. However, a number of general comments should be reiterated:

- There is the need for a clear definition of technological education;
- Attitudes towards technology and technical studies must be changed;
- Linkage programs with business and industry, post-secondary institutions and the community need to be established;
- Teacher education must be given priority; and,
- Funding is essential before changes can be implemented.

With specific reference to the specialization years, OPSBA argues that it is not the role of secondary schools to provide specialized training, nor can they afford state-of-the-art technological equipment. A broad-based program should provide an overview, enabling students to explore interests and options and develop a base for further learning, either in the workplace or at a post-secondary institution. Initiatives such as SWAP, cooperative education and other linkages between schools and the business/industrial sector provide on-the-job experience. Formal articulation agreements with community colleges provide students with opportunities to begin learning specific skills while still in high school.

Extensive comments on these and other issues are contained in our response to the technological education consultation document.

G4. French as a Second Language

It is important that students have access to a variety of French-as-a-second language options ranging from basic to identified gifted level.

It is important that students in the immersion program have a chance to acquire the required hours of instruction for the Ministry certificate.

The shortage of qualified teachers of FSL has been identified by a number of researchers and OPSBA would stress that the government must develop policies and action plans to address this issue.

G5. French-language Schools

G6. Gender Equity

OPSBA is supportive of policies which promote gender equity in the Faculties of Education, school boards and schools. We would stress that resources acceptable for Circular 14 should be screened for gender equity and new course guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education should give equal weight to the achievements of men and women.

G7. Integrated Services

There must be a wide range of health and social support programs in all communities to support education. Not all children come into the school system ready and able to learn, and this must be recognized in provincial social policy and funding. These programs should not be legislated or mandated by the provincial government, but be delivered in response to the needs of the population of the area. They should reflect the diversity of circumstances across the province and be subject to variety in service design and method of delivery.

OPSBA recognizes the need for the coordination of services and cooperation between the various delivery agencies at both the local, regional and provincial levels. Not only is there the need to coordinate children's services programs; there is the need to coordinate education and adult re-training initiatives of schools with programs provided by community colleges, universities and community-based trainers.

Ways in which this cooperation and coordination can be achieved can vary from community to community based on local needs and resources. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that school boards should not bear the financial responsibility for these non-educational programs and services.

G8. Native Education

Improving the school success of native students must be a priority. Some of the changes necessary to accomplish this objective are of potential benefit to all

students and therefore should be systematically addressed. Separate or add-on initiatives for Native students are likely to be far less effective than strategies designed to make schools places of genuine learning for all.

Nevertheless, there are a number of areas that can be identified as requiring specific attention. These include the need for adequate support services, language training, lack of adequate technological education facilities in northern communities, teacher in-service and the need for mentoring programs for native students.

Many native students are at risk because of poverty, family unemployment, health problems and housing deficiencies. Very few Native students reach the specialization years and their success must be routed in programs and initiatives in the earlier years of the education continuum.

Language Training

Successful language learning - speaking, listening, reading and writing - is central to school success. Many Native students are at a severe disadvantage in secondary school because of inadequate language skills. Part of the solution lies in significant improvement in the teaching of language in the early years. To this end, we invite the Ministry of Education to investigate the interface between provincial and federally funded schools to determine whether better cooperation in areas of teacher training, pre-service and in-service, teacher recruitment and curriculum development might enhance the learning opportunities of students.

Racism

Native students and their parents experience racism in the school system. Racism acts as a barrier to student success by contributing to a lack of development of self-esteem, lowered expectation of self, lower expectation of students by others, and often an expectation of failure. We acknowledge that overt expressions of racism towards Native people may have declined, but the subtle, systematic discrimination that many experience may be even more damaging. As the government proceeds with its intention for boards to develop anti-racist policies and practices, the issue of racism against native people must receive special focus.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Many Native students are bused to schools on busing schedules that do not often allow for students to participate in extra-curricular activities before and after school.

The "child at risk" studies of Dan Offord et al. have identified recreation as an important component of success for students at risk. Ministry policies should identify the importance of extra-curricular activities to the education of adolescents and advise boards to adopt policies and practices which encourage all students to participate.

Availability of Teachers

Native students require teaches who are knowledgeable and committed to their success. In addition, they need to see and experience teachers themselves who are Native. Native communities are increasingly committed to the provision of fully qualified Native teachers. We urge the Ministry to include the need to address employment equity with affirmative action strategies for the training and recruitment of Native teachers.

There is the need for in-service programs for current teachers to become familiar with and receptive to the needs of the native students and their families.

G9. Needs of Students New to Canada

The impact of the federal immigration policy on school boards must be recognized by the specialization years workteam in terms of programs both for youths and adults.

School boards are having difficulty, without adequate financial assistance from the federal and provincial governments, in meeting the English or French language training needs of the growing number of immigrant and refugee children and adults enroling in public schools throughout Ontario.

Not only do school boards have to provide language training, they have been forced to provide settlement services (e.g. counselling, interpretation, translation, social services) to immigrant children because federal resources are directed only to the settlement needs of adults. In many jurisdictions the needs are so overwhelming the school system simply is not able to respond.

These issues must be made a priority with the provincial government and should be brought to the attention of the Council of Ministers of Education for action.

A province-wide task force should be established to

- investigate all issues surrounding immigration settlement issues including language training; and,

- encourage inter-ministerial cooperation in the development of necessary new policies.

G10. Racial and Ethno-cultural Equity
Schools should be places where all students are comfortable, regardless of culture.

G11. School Culture
OPSBA believes that education is a partnership between the school, the parents and the community. Parents should be encouraged to become more involved in the education of their children.

School culture and organization has been shown to be significant to success in the transition from elementary to secondary school. OPSBA believes that the components of school organization which are important for the transition years are equally important for the specialization years:

- the importance of close, trusting relationships with adults and peers
- small learning environments
- teacher and student teams
- adult advisors/mentors
- strong leadership
- high expectations
- consistency
- discipline

There is no one model which will achieve all of these objectives, instead, individual school boards should be able to adapt current structures. For example, there are a variety of ways in which to create smaller learning environments including the creation of mini-communities within schools. Current OSIS policy already provides for these structures by recommending that students who share common courses be grouped together for part of the school day while the balance of their timetable is individual.

Semester System

School boards experience a number of difficulties with the current semester system due to Ministry regulations regarding the school year. Unless special permission is received from the Minister, the first semester cannot start until after Labour Day and and finishes at the end of January. The second semester starts in February and runs until the end of June.

As a result of these timelines, there is an increasing problem for students graduating from the semester system with regard to admission to post-secondary education. While an increasing number of students are completing secondary school after the first semester, very few universities offer a February admission to the general arts program and there is no access to the specialized programs at the February entry point.

The current regulations should be amended to allow for more flexibility in organizing the current instructional school year. School boards should be given more autonomy to set the school calendar so that differences in local and community aspirations can be addressed.

Pilot projects should be undertaken to assess the impact of differing school organizational strategies and the results shared among school boards.

In order to alleviate the short term problems with the current school year organization based on the semester system, there is the further need for

- the Ministry of Education to study the possibility of congruence between university/college and school calendars;

- regulations to provide timelines for the termination of teacher contracts which accommodate the current semester system.

G12. Special Education Programs and Services

Before any changes are proposed with regard to the education of students with exceptionalities in the specialization years,

- there must be clarification of terms and a building of consensus on these terms;

- assessment and placement issues must be defined; and,

- conditions necessary for success of various options, including financial and human resources, must be in place.

In designing and implementing programs for students with exceptionalities, the ideal goal is that of maximum possible integration. However, schools will encounter obstacles of a more practical nature in attempting to place exceptional students in the most enabling environment. The choice of a particular model of instruction is dependent on factors such as teacher preparation and attitudes, peer and parental attitude, not to mention the cost of changing the existing structures (be they physical, curricular or attitudinal) to accommodate the implementation of the ideal.

Not only are there definitional ambiguities and a variety of programs from which to choose; other intervening factors cannot be ignored. A sampling of other issues that must be taken into account when making placement and program decisions include: school board size and geographical location; the safety of other pupils; the availability of local expertise and support services; physical accessibility of the school; and, cost.

OPSBA has discussed issues related to the identification and placement of exceptional students in general in its position paper in response to the Ministry of Education consultation document on integration. The comments are applicable to all exceptional students whether they are in the early, formative or specialization years. A copy is appended for your information [Appendix D].

G13. Student Retention

A number of research studies on the issue of student retention have been undertaken by a variety of federal and provincial governments and agencies over the past few years. All offer some insight into the issue of student retention. No one solution to the issue of student retention is possible. OPSBA believes that if education in the specialization years achieves a true balance between the needs of the individual and the needs of society; provides a foundation of learning; offers a variety of learning structures and options such as cooperative education and individualized learning; provides direction to enable students to make informed choices, the retention rate will improve. Regardless of these initiatives, school boards must afford the opportunity for individuals who choose to try other alternatives to "drop back in" to the formal secondary school system.

G14. Teacher Education

Effective teacher in-service training will be of critical importance to the success of any reforms to education. Before any new programs are mandated, there must be adequate time and resources for teacher in-service programs to be developed and provided.

Not only is teacher training and in-service imperative if changes are to be implemented, but teachers must be involved in the planning for change. It is only through active participation in the change process that teachers can achieve a sense of ownership in the process.

Much of the literature and comment concerning improvement in school achievement points to the need for changed teacher practices. This may be even more important now that the school systems of this province are being urged to refocus their efforts from "equal opportunity" to "equity of outcome".

These requirements are being made in a fiscal climate of restraint in which many boards have few choices, except to curtail programs. As a result, OPSBA recommends that the financial responsibility for in-service teacher training be shared more directly by the Ministry of Education and school boards.

We recognize the contribution made by professional development programs of the teacher federations to the ongoing education of practising teachers, and that the additional qualifications programs are heavily utilized.

While these are important, we believe that there may be a need for a more systematic approach to teacher in-service programming with a focus on the school and school system level so that new learning is more broadly spread among the teaching profession. To this end, successful approaches and initiatives in teacher retraining such as peer coaching, the effect of democratization on school decision-making and the role of the principal in staff change should be documented.

Models for expansion of in-service opportunities in small boards need consideration, cooperative projects between school systems, sharing of staff resources and the role of Regional offices in teacher support should be examined.

SPECIFIC ISSUES AND POLICY OPTIONS

S1. Integrated Learning Activities

Policy decisions on integrated learning activities cannot be treated in isolation from the more general policy decisions related to the role of the school system in terms of the level of specialization that schools should be expected to provide and in what areas.

OPSBA recognizes that there is the need to make current subjects more relevant to the students. One way of achieving this is to provide for more integration of subjects and a lessening of the rigid subject delineations that currently exist in the secondary schools.

The integration of subjects is also a logical expansion of what is happening in the transition years. For many teachers, however, this is going to provide some real difficulty. Philosophically, many are committed to their subject disciplines and it will need a good deal of focused teacher in-service to change their attitudes and techniques.

OPSBA supports the proposed policy directions which recognize the need for flexibility, responsiveness to local needs and resources and does not mandate one specific approach to be adhered to by all boards. Policies should

- Encourage the development of courses based on more than one school subject. Groups of courses or parts of courses could be planned in the same manner.

- Allow for locally developed courses that use ideas from several ministry guidelines. Provide individual codes for such courses.

- Develop guidelines based on general skills that apply to several subjects.

- Provide teacher education courses related to integrated learning activities (in addition to teacher qualification for school subjects).

Guidelines based on general skills that apply to several subjects would provide a student with firm generic skills and a chance to explore more options before choosing an area of specialization.

Integrated studies can and should happen. However, change should occur in a phased manner and before any major changes are proposed there should be pilot projects to examine possibilities and evaluate changes.

S2. Overcrowded Curriculum

The overcrowded curriculum can only be addressed as educators and the public arrive at a consensus on what secondary graduates should be taking with them as they graduate from high school. Once this happens, the current curriculum could then be examined and redundancies and irrelevant courses and subjects either be eliminated or integrated into a more holistic approach to curriculum development and delivery.

There must be preparation for both work and post-secondary education as well exposure to as life skills and career planning instruction.

OPSBA supports encouragement of the development and delivery of courses in cooperation with community agencies and other external organizations. For example, the apprenticeship programs and various articulation agreements provide for cooperation between different agencies.

There is no one solution to the "crowded curriculum" . In addition to the option of restructuring the school day and year, better utilization of the current instructional time through better teaching, more uninterrupted teaching and a more integrated curriculum should be explored.

S3. Subject Specialization in Teacher Education

OPSBA supports the expansion of subject specific courses so that they provide more emphasis on varied learning processes, critical thinking skills and cross-curricular themes and objectives. This must include a wider variety of teaching strategies in pre-service courses, eg team teaching, interdisciplinary courses, cooperative learning, adapting to different learning styles, independent learning.

Subject specific courses will continue to be taught but they must also include broader generic skills and processes which will allow students to have a more unified, holistic sense of their learning.

S4. The Guidance Program

Guidance counsellors are currently focusing on three areas of counselling: career, social and personal, and academic. Certificate programs have tended to prepare counsellors better in the latter two areas.

A high proportion of school counsellors have no knowledge of the labour market - local or national. Workers in industry who are responsible for helping young people enter the labour market are equally unprepared. There is a need for closer ties between education and the world of work in order to develop strategies that will prepare young people better for a working life.

We must provide a balanced guidance program which emphasizes career education and educational planning along with a personal counselling focus.

One strategy is that school boards consider partnerships with local businesses that can train guidance counsellors in areas such as human resource development strategies and mentorship programs. Career education and career planning should become an integrated focus of subject curriculum without taking over the curriculum.

S5. Gender and Educational/Career Choices

Women must be encouraged to move into any area that their interest and skills would indicate. The emphasis in the specialization years must build out of what has happened earlier in the education continuum.

All of the suggestions provided in the consultation document make sense and can be supported:

- Establish provincial awards for "excellence for mathematics/science/technology" for female and male students
- Encourage processes to measure student attitudes about subjects and subject choices.

- Provide incentives for the development and delivery of in-service programs for teachers on gender issues

- Provide incentives for partnerships with technology-oriented enterprises/agencies to provide work experience for male and female students in the field of science and technology.

- Encourage an outreach program by colleges and universities in which faculties of mathematics, science and technology provide orientation programs for secondary school female and male students.

S6. Cooperative Education/Work Experience

Cooperative education is a valuable experience for all students. Cooperative education lets students investigate potential careers and gain experience useful to finding employment after graduation. However, with few exceptions, these programs have not tended to expose students to skilled trades. Co-operative education programs provide an excellent bridge to employment. A package program at the senior secondary school level that includes life and employability skills, specific vocational training and a cooperative education component begins to address the problem of an artificial divorce between school and work.

Care must also be taken that the in-school portion of the program is well matched with the out-of-school segment and that the student is receiving a valued learning experience.

There is the need for greater flexibility for cooperative education programs. School boards should be allowed to develop a variety of cooperative education models to meet local needs. There needs to be an expansion of the types of cooperative education programs to include such areas as social service, community service and the skilled trades.

Flexibility in program type and structure must recognize the unique needs of different communities in the province. For example, in communities in northern Ontario, it is very difficult to find appropriate cooperative experiences for students. Other kinds of learning opportunities such as student exchanges should be encouraged and financially supported by the province.

S7. Small Schools

Many small schools have a great deal of difficulty in providing all the programs and options currently allowed for in the specialization years. These boards should be encouraged to plan school programs with other means of earning credits eg distance education programs, correspondence courses, computer-assisted instruction and individualized programs. Schools can offer more courses of study to small student populations by this method than by the traditional subject-specific delivery methods.

The province should provide monetary incentives to encourage shared facilities and transportation between public and separate schools.

Isolate School Boards

In addition to the issue of small schools, attention by the Ministry of Education must be given to the issue of secondary education in isolate boards in northern Ontario.

Currently, in order to receive secondary school education, students have to leave their home community to attend school in other jurisdictions. A few schools offer a limited selection of courses for Grades 9 and 10, but most students must leave home right out of Grade 8.

These students experience a number of difficulties which are similar to those detailed for native students. Adapting to living away from home, finding a suitable boarding home, and adjusting to a new school and community are just a few. As a result, they have a very high dropout rate. The Ministry of Education should undertake a study of the problems they experience and of ways to help solve them.

In addition, the isolate boards in the north have indicated a need for various alternatives for these students and request that the Ministry of Education examine, in consultation with them, the whole matter of secondary school education in their communities. A variety of options for the provision of these programs should be considered including, at a minimum, the following:

- the establishment of isolate secondary school boards;
- the establishment of boards of education which would provide both elementary and secondary education;

- the establishment of territorial and/or regional isolate secondary school boards;

- the establishment of a Ministry of Education distance education register which would enable students to take distance education credit courses from another board and generate a high cost factor for boards delivering these credits.

Regardless of the alternative chosen, the provision of programs through distance education will be a major component of secondary education for isolate students. In this regard, in addition to the need for equipment, there is the need for the Ministry of Education to coordinate a provincial approach to the development of consistently high quality distance education programs. There is currently no such uniformity in quality. As well, the Ministry should be looking at more innovative usage of technology in education and should be taking a leadership role in developing programs to try out such innovations.

S8. The Extra-curricular Program

A variety of options for extra-curricular programs should be encouraged to broaden the students' outlook on life. Education involves more than just academic qualifications.

Extra-curricular programs are often the first things that are cut when budgets are tight. OPSBA supports policies that

- Encourage, on a regular basis, assessment of the success of each school's extra-curricular program and how well it meets the needs of students and staff;

- Encourage schools to give recognition and to express appreciation to their staff members involved in the extra-curricular program;

- Encourage school boards to allocate resources for administering extra-curricular programs;

- Encourage schools to seek volunteers for extra-curricular programs from community members and individuals wishing to pursue careers in education.

S9. Curriculum Organization: Credit System, Graduation Requirements, Levels of Difficulty

Based on a survey of OPSBA member boards in 1991,there was a general level of satisfaction with the implementation of OSIS to date. Until all guideline reviews are completed and new guidelines implemented, there should be no major changes in OSIS directions.

Levels of Difficulty

When dealing with teaching courses with differing levels of difficulty, two issues must be highlighted: teacher education and curriculum.

Teachers are not adequately trained to teach the basic and general level courses nor can they relate to students who elect to take the courses. Teachers have been very successful in turning out students who are academically inclined but have more difficulty in teaching students who are not university or post-secondary education bound. The need for in-service cannot be overstated for teachers to teach at the basic and general level. In addition, there must be more flexibility in terms of qualifications of technological education teachers.

Curriculum needs to be developed for differing levels of difficulty.

S10. Definition of a Credit

Although OPSBA supports continuation of the credit system, we feel that there is an over-emphasis on the role of class time in attaining a credit rather than any form of mastery learning. If benchmarks of competency are clearly stated and measurable - the acquisition of this base-line competency will allow the student completion of the credit, regardless of the time taken.

OPSBA supports a policy direction which places greater emphasis on what is learned rather than on a specified minimum number of hours and the successful completion of course work.

S11. Credits for External Courses

OPSBA's stated position is that school boards should maintain the exclusive right to provide secondary school credits and graduation diplomas.

S12. The Meaning of the Graduation Diploma
S13. The Meaning of the Certificate of Education

The whole issue of the granting of a diploma has nothing to do with what it is called. Instead, a diploma is only useful if there is a clear understanding by the public, employers, post-secondary institutions with regards to what it implies. What does the granting of a diploma mean with regard to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that a student has achieved?

Perhaps we should examine, as one possibility to making graduation from high school more understandable, the awarding of a series of diplomas which reflect individual concentrations, eg. business, technological studies, university preparation, college preparation.

S14. Reporting Student Achievement

If we are serious about reporting on knowledge, skills and attitudes, then report cards will have to change to reflect these skills and attitudes as well as the knowledge learned. As new transition years report cards are developed, they will affect the ways we report on students during the specialization years.

The single mark per subject will have to be modified to include other kinds of reporting such as anecdotal comments based on careful examination of students. Much of our present testing/examination program will need to change to reflect a greater emphasis on the acquisition of higher order skills.

We should ensure that as many areas as possible (for example, knowledge, skills and attitudes, career education, extra-curricular involvement, leadership, community services) are reported.

Whatever means of reporting are developed, they must be relevant and understandable by the student, parents and society in general.

S15. Religious Education Credits

OPSBA recommends that religious education remain an optional program for secondary school students in Ontario and that adequate Ministry guidelines and resource documents be developed. It is further recommended that provision be made for two optional credit courses in religious education at the intermediate and senior levels. These courses should be non-confessional in nature and include a

comparative perspective and should be offered by school boards, where numbers warrant.

S16. Delivery Models for Adult Education in the Specialization Years

OPSBA supports a flexible approach to the provision of adult education. For specific comments on the issues related to adult education, refer to Appendix A.

S17. Graduation Equivalence

The present policy should be modified to permit increased flexibility by the principal in assessing credits to be allocated to a student with solid practical/academic experience. Provincial guidelines should be established to provide assistance in granting credit equivalency. They should not, however, be so rigid as to prevent the professional expertise of the principal being exercised to address the individual case.